MICHAEL KOWALSKI RESPONDS

I ADMIT THAT MY REMARKS concerning Eduard Hanslick were conceived in semi-ignorance. *Mea culpa.*

I wish that the author had read my essay with the same due care he accords Hanslick. Never do I state or imply that absolute music means nothing more than "music composed with reference to its own structure and its place in the history of Western art music." I do state that certain music can only be understood in the context of other music. Yes, knowledge of musical contexts is a necessary condition for the understanding of complex compositions. And as a necessary condition deteriorates, the whole edifice crumbles. But no, knowledge of musical contexts alone is never a sufficient condition for understanding anything.

After all of the trouble I took to describe how musical idioms arise out of extramusical contexts, how can the author infer that, for me, absolute music is nothing more than the arid manipulation of ciphers? If he sees the spectre of desiccated formalism lurking behind my every other turn of phrase, I respectfully submit that he is seeing his own reflection. Consider the author's definition of "compose":

> . . . to nourish and protect a sympathy for sounds by placing them in time in such a way that they embrace formal and acoustical poetic logics while resorting neither to acoustical inventories nor formalistic justifications.

If that were my credo, I'd keep it to myself, if only out of self-defense. The last thing Central European culture needs in late twentieth-century America is a dose of such stodgy apologetics.

And yes, oh yes, the second person: The rhetorical use of the second person might have been patronizing in the hands of a superior stylist—perhaps Cicero. In this case I feel safe in assuming that it points to nothing worse than bad literary judgment.

New York
July 11, 1985